

Polish Pottery

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Chapter 1

About Polish Pottery



Courtesy of Ceramika Millena

Congratulations! If you are reading this book then you are intrigued by some of the most interesting pottery available on the market today. Polish pottery is fascinating in its decorations that are based upon traditional design motifs that are hundreds of years old.

This specialty pottery is made in only one location in the world, namely the area around the small historic town of Boleslawiec (pronounced Bol-e-swa-vee-ec), Poland which was first settled in 1202. The town is located in southwestern Poland just 50 miles from the border with Germany. Boleslawiec has been a center for ceramics for over 200 years and many of the pottery shops have been in the same family for generations. When you acquire today's Polish pottery, you are also getting a unique piece of history and Old World heritage.

Even with all the quaint charm of the traditional Polish patterns, today's Polish pottery is designed to meet the demands of modern life. The entire product line of Polish pottery, the plates, cups, serving

bowls, tureens, cereal dishes, and the like, is made from natural products, glazed and is kiln fired so that the resulting pieces are dishwasher-safe, oven-proof and can be used in the microwave. Some manufacturers claim that their pottery can go into the freezer, into the oven, onto the table for serving and then into the dishwasher. (Allow pieces to come to room temperature before going from the freezer to the oven or the item will crack.)



Location of Bolesławiec
From <http://www.ceramika-artystyczna.pl>

All the Polish pottery from the Bolesławiec area is decorated by hand using lead-free paints and glazes. The patterns are applied to the formed clay pieces only by hand; there are no transfer patterns like you see in other types of well-known dinnerware so each piece is uniquely made.

There are two methods of applying patterns to the individual pottery items. One method is hand stamping with small sponges. The other is hand painting with brushes. Some Polish ceramic companies

exclusively use one method while others will produce pieces either way. Companies will usually advertise how their pottery is decorated.

If you like to travel, consider a trip to Poland to experience for yourself the ceramic heritage of the Boleslawiec area. Every year, during the last week in August, Boleslawiec hosts their Ceramics Festival. At the heart of the festival are the booths in the Town Square from the local ceramics factories. The term “factory direct” has a new meaning when you purchase Polish pottery from the manufacturer during the festival! Of course, all festivals include the best in local music, cuisine and camaraderie.

But if you can't visit Boleslawiec in person, read on to explore the fascinating world of countless patterns, family businesses, individual artists and designers plus the ancient history of Polish pottery.

Chapter 2

Major Manufacturers of Polish Pottery



Courtesy of Ceramika Millena

Over the centuries the area of the world known as Poland has been conquered and claimed by its surrounding countries but Polish heritage and traditions have always prevailed in the end. The latest chapter in Poland's rich cultural history sees this proud country and its people emerging from Communist rule and returning to a free society. Part of the current transformation is renewed economic activity with other parts of the world, including the United States. Now a member of the European Union as of May, 2004, Polish companies and entrepreneurs are striving to grow the economy and redevelop Poland into a thriving country once again.

One of the best ways to begin restoring the economy of Poland is to rekindle exports of traditional and well-known products. For example, some of the first Polish products to reach the American

market as Poland's economic revival began after Communist rule were Polish crystal, hand-painted Christmas ornaments and Polish pottery. Fortunately, for those of us who are fascinated by Polish pottery, the pottery industry was rebuilt and has reached sufficient capacity to fill the American market with the best in Polish traditional and new designs from a host of talented artists hard at work today.



In Częstochowa, a city in southern Poland
Manufacturing Christmas Ornaments
From www.poland.gov.pl

In our technology driven society, so many of the products we utilize every day are produced on an assembly line, virtually untouched by human hands. Even the bread we as Americans find on our grocery shelves is produced in automated bakeries where the bread dough is formed into loaves, baked, cooled, sliced, packaged, and stacked solely by machines. But innate in our human spirit is a desire to create items by hand; we still appreciate hand-made crafts that reveal a person's artistic talents. Many of prefer to use or collect the fine Polish pottery that is still made and decorated by skilled artisans using unique and traditional patterns that have been part of the Polish heritage for numerous generations.

In the recent past, longstanding ceramic companies in the traditional pottery making area around Boleslawiec have re-opened or expanded their factory facilities to meet the needs of a free-market economy while new factories have opened as well. Cooperatives owned by employees as well as family-owned businesses better their unique wares in a global marketplace. Let's look at the history behind some of the best known makers of Polish pottery today.

Andy Ceramics

While Andy Ceramics is quite an American sounding name, Andy Ceramics is indeed located just outside the primary Polish pottery-making center of Boleslawiec. Andy Ceramics is an independent small family-owned business where all pottery pieces continue to be made by hand. The result is that their pieces may not be perfectly uniform in shape and the patterns may not be exactly duplicated from item to item, but that's part of the treasure of completely hand-crafted works of art.

Andy Ceramics has produced over 50 unique decorative designs that are placed on the items they manufacture, creating about one new design per year. Their modern designs predominantly feature large floral motifs rather than the fine dot patterns produced by other Polish pottery manufacturers.

Ceramika Artystyczna

The name of this company, Ceramika Artystyczna, literally translates to Ceramic Art. Ceramika Artystyczna is a cooperative, not a family business or a company; under Communist rule cooperatives are the normal way businesses are run.

The history of Ceramika Artystyczna as an entity dates back to 1950 when the Polish people were attempting to recover from the devastation inflicted upon Poland during World War II. With the Boleslawiec area being so close to Germany, about 80 percent of the manufacturing resources of the area were destroyed during the war.

In 1950 under the jurisdiction of the State Committee of Economic Planning, the Centre of the Folk and Artistic Industry was ordered to re-establish the ceramics industry in Boleslawiec to begin economic reconstruction in the area. An existing but closed plant, Julius Paul und Sohn (Julius Paul and Son), became the start-up location for rekindling the ceramics industry. The first ceramics experts sent by the committee implemented a training program and set up operations. At first there were only a few employees who only made vases.

By 1951 the work expanded to painting the pottery with brushes and sponges. In 1954 the start-up plant officially became a cooperative with a supervisory board and its own managers and there were 45 workers employed. By 1958 the cooperative was finally making a profit on the output of just 8 ceramic firing furnaces.

But the old building that housed the plant wasn't suited for increased production and the cooperative decided to build its own manufacturing facility in 1963. By 1965, there were 54 employees. In 1971 the manufacturing plant was upgraded and by 1974 production peaked at 150 tons of ceramic ware produced per year. Outgrowing its facilities, the cooperative was ready to expand again and the proposed new facility that would increase production and triple the number of workers was approved. By 1979, there were 74 employees and the cooperative's high quality and uniquely beautiful products were being

exported to Denmark, Sweden, West Germany, East Germany, United States, Austria, Belgium, Spain, France, and the Soviet Union.

Fortunately for those of us who love Polish pottery, Ceramika Artystyczna prospered so well that in 1985 the construction of a new plant was begun. Finally, in December, 1989 production at the old Julius Paul und Sohn plant ceased and the new plant produced 600 tons of pottery per year. In 1993 there were 170 employees and production doubled again.



Ceramika Artystyczna Headquarters, Established 1989
From: <http://www.ceramika-artystyczna.pl>

As of 2000, Ceramika Artystyczna employed 230 workers who make distinctive Polish pottery that is decorated in hundreds of patterns inspired by traditional Polish designs as well as modern pieces that continue to win awards at ceramic design competitions around the world. If you love Polish pottery enough to take a trip to Boleslawiec for the Ceramics Festival, be sure to visit the Ceramika Artystyczna Factory Store which was recently upgraded to provide the amenities that tourists expect in a modern factory outlet.



Inside Ceramika Artystyczna Factory Store
From <http://www.ceramika-artystyczna.pl>

Ceramika Artystyczna Wiza

This company name roughly translates to Ceramic Art of Wiza. Ceramika Artystyczna Wiza is a Polish pottery factory that was established in 1963 by Stanislaw Wiza. He established his business at the location once occupied by the closed Tuppak and Silesia pottery firms. In true entrepreneurial fashion, Wiza started small and after successful upgrades in equipment and processes, the company now employs 120 individuals and exports products to North America, Germany, England and Italy.

Wiza pottery currently offers a total of 32 decorative patterns that are applied to their stoneware. Proud of their heritage, Wiza offers numerous traditional designs plus 14 custom designs from their own local artists. While continuing to provide customers with the well-known deep traditional cobalt blue hues, the designers at Wiza are refining ceramic processes that will expand their product line into lighter shades and new designs.

Lest anyone believe that all Polish pottery is functional and designed for the table, Wiza offers decorative vases, Christmas ornaments, Christmas decorations, candle holders, animal figurines, trinket boxes, picture frames, and clocks.

Ceramika Millena

Ceramika Millena is another family-owned pottery business that is located just five miles outside Boleslawiec. This company was established in 1998 and specializes in floral designs and other patterned ware.



Ceramika Millena Factory and Mark
Courtesy of Ceramika Millena

Dana

Another small pottery maker from the Boleslawiec area is Dana, which was established in 1976. One special feature of Dana pottery pieces is that they are made completely by hand; there is no machinery at the Dana factory. Some designs are painted by hand while others are added by stamping.



For those fortunate enough to be able to personally visit Poland can spend some time at the Dana factory store. Dana provides lots of animal figurine and other specialty items like covered cheese dishes, affectionately called cheese ladies, as well as dinnerware.



Sample Dana Pottery

Stoneware Factory Manufaktura

Manufaktura is a family-owned pottery business in Bolesławiec that ranks highly in the competition with the nearby cooperatives Ceramika Artystyczna and Zakłady Bolesławiec Ceramika. Manufaktura products are also known throughout the world for their quality. Unlike the other pottery factories that began production after World War II, Manufaktura was established in 1993 with just ten employees from two families. Today there are 110 full-time employees.

Manufaktura makes a wide array of ceramic products for the home, including unique teapots and pitchers as well as full line of tableware. The designs on the handmade pottery are applied using the sponge stamping technique. Manufaktura offers traditional designs as well as modern creations and a specialty line of artist signed unique (Unikat) pottery pieces.



Zakłady Bolesławiec Ceramika

Since the official name Zakłady Bolesławiec Ceramika is rather cumbersome, most sellers and lovers of this old line of Polish pottery simply call it Zakłady. Remember that over the course of centuries the map of central Europe has changed numerous times, repeatedly moving the borders of countries like Poland. The town of Bolesławiec once was part of Germany and was named Bunslau.

One very interesting fact about Zakłady pottery is that the company began as a German pottery maker in Bunslau and their line of traditional patterns is more associated with German heritage than similar Polish designs. In fact, even today some Germans refer to what we call Polish pottery as Bunzlauer Geschirr or simply Bunzlauer. But Zakłady is definitely a Polish-owned factory today that is operated as a state-owned cooperative.

Zakłady is one of the oldest and best known makers of Polish pottery and continues the tradition of hand-made ceramic pieces. While Zakłady focuses on producing a full line of traditional patterns and pieces, the product line also includes plain glazed dinnerware or table settings with a minimal amount of modern decoration. The extensive Zakłady offerings include products in 1,300 different shapes and sizes, with an unknown number of decorative patterns.



Zakłady Traditional Pattern
 From <http://www.ceramicboleslawiec.com.pl>



Zakłady Modern Design
 From <http://www.ceramicboleslawiec.com.pl>

WR Unikat

Unikat literally means unique and is also the descriptive term for all new designs that are created by an artist. All designs are hand painted. The WR company of Boleslawiec was founded by Wladyslaw Rutyna and the company specializes in unikat pottery. The term has become an extension of the company name and the formal name of its extensive product line. So the company logo just shows the actual company name, WR.



While other companies produce traditional as well as modern designs, WR specializes solely in floral motifs and all designs are painted by hand. WR has been in business for over 20 years and employs 70 people.

Chapter 3

How Polish Pottery Is Made



"Our Pottery is truly natural and ecologic because it involves only the four Universe elements - Earth, Wind, Water and Fire"
Ceramika Millena

Polish pottery is the result of combining the four elements of the Universe – Earth, Wind, Water and Fire – with the unbounded human elements of imagination and artistic expression. The beauty of this complex composition occupies a unique niche in the realm of artistry. Polish pottery has won uncountable awards in ceramics competitions around the world and over the centuries plus has captured the hearts of everyday folks who cherish their pieces of Polish and German heritage. As the world keeps evolving into a complex international society based upon technology, part of the magic of Polish pottery is

that it remains a human endeavor, where skilled artisans fabricate and decorate each piece by hand using time-honored processes.

Earth – Polish pottery begins with elements directly from the earth that are found in the clay soil around Boleslawiec. There are three sources of clay in Poland which are divided into groups based on geological formation and geographic location: clays of the Central Polish Mountains, those of the Bunzlau basin and those of the Strehlen basin. We already know that Boleslawiec was named Bunzlau centuries ago when the area was part of Germany. The Bunzlau basin includes the land around the Bobr and Kwis Rivers adjacent to Boleslawiec.

Earthenware clay is less expensive clay that has a high iron content which finishes to a deep rusty color. Earthenware needs a glaze in order to hold liquids. Remember from the history of Polish pottery that earthenware goods were once an important product from the Boleslawiec region.



White clay mine near Boleslawiec
Courtesy of Ceramika Millena

Today's pottery is made from stoneware grade clay which is stronger than earthenware and results in a dense and hard finished product. White stoneware clay fires to white due to its molochite content and is the base for the Polish pottery currently on the market. Stoneware clay is not the same as porcelain clay; porcelain clay is the whitest and purest form of ceramic material. Fine white sand, also available in the area, is mixed with the clay.



Local source of white sand
Courtesy of Ceramika Millena

Wind – Wind or air is essential to the creation of pottery. Air is needed to fuel the heat needed to fire ceramic pieces and conversely, air is needed to cool and harden the finished product.

Water – Water serves several purposes in the making of ceramic pieces. After clay is mined it is thoroughly dried; then when the clay is needed for processing, warm water is added. The dried clay fragments break down again into a soft malleable form; this process is called slaking down.



Mixed clay ready for shaping into product
Courtesy of Ceramika Millena

When clay is formed on a potter's wheel, extra water is needed for lubrication. Water is also essential for making the molds for forming pieces that are not made on the potter's wheel.



Craftsman using the potter's wheel
Courtesy of Ceramika Millena

Fire – Durable, hardened pottery would not be possible without intense heat. The earliest ceramic kilns were heated by fire but of course modern kilns are powered by electricity. Ceramic firing requires extreme temperatures in the vicinity of 2250 degrees F for stoneware.



Placing items in the kiln
Courtesy of Ceramika Millena

Steps in Producing the Pottery

While custom pieces and large items like flower urns are formed individually by a skilled artisan on the potter's wheel, production pieces like teapots, pitchers, figurines, small flowerpots, serving pieces and dinnerware are formed using ceramic molds. Using molds is of course faster than creating each piece completely by hand and molds provide a greater uniformity in the finished products.

A highly skilled and experienced artisan is responsible for forming the molds, which are usually created from plaster or gypsum. Molds are filled with the clay mixture to form the desired piece of

pottery and while a mold can be reused numerous times, eventually the mold wears out and must be replaced.

For unique artistic pottery pieces like those that are sent for competitions, the artist may break the mold so that the unique piece can never be exactly duplicated. If you're familiar with the old saying, "They broke the mold after they made you," you now understand that it comes from the making of ceramics.



Making a mold for a small flowerpot
Courtesy of Ceramika Millena

On the production line, a skilled and experienced ceramics worker fills a mold with the prepared clay. These pictures completely support the claims that Polish pottery is made by hand.



Making a mold for a small flowerpot
Courtesy of Ceramika Millena

Once the clay mixture hardens in the mold, the formed piece is removed from the mold and accessory pieces like handles and finials made from molded clay are attached to the piece by hand.



Adding a handle to a teapot by hand
Courtesy of Ceramika Millena



Adding a handle to a teapot by hand
Courtesy of Ceramika Millena

Next the products are given a first firing in the ceramic kiln. When they are ready to move on to the decorating phase, they are washed to prepare the surface for painting.



Washing prior to decorating
Courtesy of Ceramika Millena

When the ceramic piece is finally ready, an experienced and highly skilled ceramic artist applies the pattern completely by hand, adding every tiny detail with delicacy and precision.



Adding a delicate pattern to a teapot
Courtesy of Ceramika Millena



Amazing patience and skill
Courtesy of Ceramika Millena



Contemporary large floral design
Courtesy of Ceramika Millena

After the ceramic piece is completely decorated, it is ready for application of the glaze. The technique for applying the glaze depends upon the size of the item. Small pieces are individually dipped by hand in glaze while large pieces are sprayed by hand.



Dipping a cup in glaze
Courtesy of Ceramika Millena



Spraying glaze on a larger item
Courtesy of Ceramika Millena

After the glaze is added, the ceramic piece is fired again to produce the finished product. For those of us who enjoy Polish pottery, understanding the complicated number of steps, all carried out by skilled hands, can only enhance our love and appreciation for the craftsmanship and artistry involved in its production.

Chapter 4

Artistry and Artists



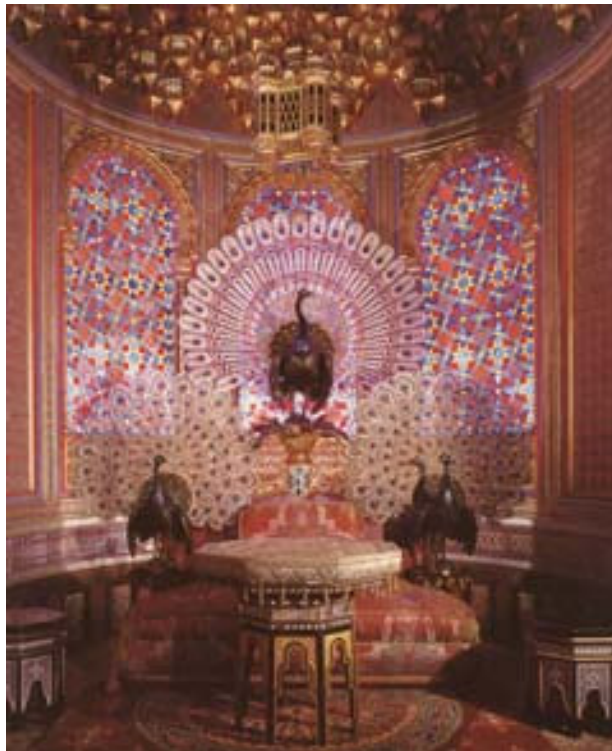
Traditional Peacock Pattern
Courtesy of Ceramika Millena



Polish pottery is decorated with intricate designs that are appealing to the eye and attractive to the human sense of artistry.

Traditional patterns that date back over three hundred years to the modern beginning of Polish pottery as we know it today feature a royal blue background and intricate application of stylized circles. How did this amazing design tradition originate?

Remember that three hundred years ago fine craftsmen, whether carpenters, potters or jewelers, were primarily employed fabricating custom elegant pieces for royalty and other wealthy patrons. European royalty were fascinated by peacocks and the male peacock with his fantail open became a favored symbol of royalty.



King Ludwig II of Bavaria Kiosk at Linderhof Castle
Peacock Throne, Built 1878

If the royal patron requested dinnerware in a pattern that reflected royal status like a peacock did, the local craftsmen were

obliged to comply and the resulting patterns are truly amazing. There are countless variations of Polish pottery designs based on this traditional theme available in the marketplace today. This is just a small sample of the diverse designs that have evolved using deep blues and circles with a contrasting center as the predominant theme.



The traditional designs are so important and pervasive that even currently popular figurines are decorated with this style.



Dana Rabbit



Ceramika Millena Teddy Bear

Predominant Colors

The deep “royal blue” that is the predominant color seen in traditional Polish pottery originates from the deep blue hues of the male peacock’s tail. Other traditional colors include shades of red, green and brown.

Centuries ago and into the recent past, harsh chemical elements were used to create deep colored paints favored by artists. Over the past decades, scientists have realized that some of the colorants used in paints were harmful to humans and as a result, governments have banned the use of these chemicals in paints. The manufacturers of Polish pottery emphasize that all the paints used in decorating Polish pottery and all glazing materials are made from natural substances that are safe for continuous everyday use in the home.

Modern Patterns

While there is a continuing market for the traditional patterns that reflect the long-standing heritage of the Polish people, styles and preferences do change over time. Some Polish pottery companies have expanded their product lines to include other patterns that achieve an overall effect that is similar to traditional patterns or break from tradition altogether. Which designs are to be included in a company’s product line is purely a business decision that is in turn either accepted or rejected by consumers.

For example, modern floral motifs are popular with consumers. The pictures below illustrate some of the floral patterns that are available from a few pottery manufacturers in the Boleslawiec area.



Ceramika Millena



Manufaktura



Wiza

Unikat Pieces

The Polish word Unikat translates to unique. However, it has an extended meaning when it is applied to Polish pottery. While a particular traditional design may be available through several pottery companies, Unikat lines of Polish pottery are custom designs that are only available from the one company that created the design. Product catalogs carefully distinguish between a standard pattern and a Unikat pattern; typically a Unikat pattern is more expensive than a standard pattern.

Many talented artists work every day at applying designs to the Polish pottery by hand. Imagine the patience and skill required to add these fine brush or sponge strokes uniformly to create the intricate

patterns every day so that buyers can enjoy their pottery for a lifetime. Some companies allow decorators to place their initials on the bottom of all pieces they produce, whether or not the item is a Unikat piece.

It takes an extra level of experience and training to be promoted to the position of designer. Individual designers are responsible for developing the new Unikat patterns that so easily capture our hearts and sense of artistry. Typically a Unikat piece has a special mark on the bottom to indicate that it is indeed a Unikat item. Some companies allow designers to place their initials or a signature on their Unikat pieces. These signature pieces of pottery command a premium price and an individual designer can gain a loyal following of buyers who wish to collect their Unikat pieces.

Artist Wladyslaw Rutyna founded WR Unikat some 20 years ago and included Unikat in the company's name to indicate that all decorative designs produced by the company would be modern, new instead of traditional, and proprietary to the WR Unikat. Of course, most Polish pottery companies carry a full product line of Unikat designs as well.

The major Boleslawiec cooperative and producer of ceramics Ceramika Artystyczna actively promotes their Unikat signature products. Ceramika Artystyczna employs nearly 30 experienced and skillful Unikat pattern designers who sign their work. For example, Maria Iwicka has been with Ceramika Artystyczna since 1981. In 1993 she was promoted to be a Unikat pattern designer. Her pieces can be recognized by the Ceramika Artystyczna logo that is accompanied by her signature. When you purchase a Unikat signature piece, you know that the artist personally produced the design on the item.



Unikat Artist Maria Iwicka and Her Signature
From <http://www.ceramika-artystyczna.pl>

There's one final point to remember about Unikat pottery. Unikat inherently relates to the pattern that appears on the pottery. Unikat distinguishes between a traditional pattern that has been placed on ceramics for decades or even centuries and a modern pattern that was designed for use by the company that developed it. The company can produce thousands of items using that pattern and it still can be called Unikat because no one else produces that design. Of course, since every piece of Polish pottery is decorated by an artist by hand (no transfers are used!), absolutely every piece is unique.

More than Pattern Design

The artistry involved in the production of Polish pottery is absolutely amazing. Trained ceramics engineers are responsible for the techniques involved in preparing the clay plus selecting suitable and non-toxic paints and glazes that are durable and achieve the desired visual effects. While we admire the intricate patterns that appear on the surface of the pottery pieces, behind the pattern artists and pattern decorators are skilled and imaginative forms designers who decide the shapes and sizes of all the items in a product line. For

example, consider some of the different teapot shapes that are produced by the forms designers at Ceramika Millena. The art of Polish pottery also includes a harmonious marriage between a shape and a pattern.



Teapots of Different Shapes
Courtesy of Ceramika Millena

Try to visualize the shorter teapots decorated with one of the small overall floral patterns that appears on one of the large teapots. The combination of shape and pattern would probably not appeal to your sense of proportion and artistry.

On the other hand, the same shape can accommodate a variety of compatible patterns and remain most attractive. Look at the two teapots shown on the next page. They are identical in shape and size and yet achieve a very different artistic effect due to the design of the pattern. While we focus on the beauty and intricacy of the pattern and respect the artistry of the pattern designer, we must remember that there are other talented individuals whose work is as important to the finished product that we cherish as a part of our homes.



Pattern Changes the Perception of Form
 Courtesy of Ceramika Millena

A piece of Polish pottery that embodies a traditional shape and is decorated with a traditional design provides a nostalgic link to the historic past and a sense of artistic appeal that has withstood the test of generations. Modern pieces and patterns reflect who we are today. For example, the teddy bear figurine pictured in an earlier chapter is a modern symbol of childhood and tenderness that is cherished by many. Today's bold floral patterns perhaps reflect a different and open society, in great contrast to the traditional patterns which were based upon royal peacocks.

Whatever the origin, there's a pattern that should appeal to just about every taste. Collecting Polish pottery provides such an interesting dilemma – what wonderful artistic piece to acquire next!

Chapter 5

The History of Polish Pottery



Archeological Museum at Poznan
From Exhibition Titled "Ancient History of Greater Poland"
From www.poland.gov.pl

While those of us who enjoy contemporary Polish pottery look forward to adding the next delightful (intact!) piece to our collection, archaeologists get excited to find some tiny pottery shard while they are carefully sweeping dirt with a small paintbrush.

Ancient History

The earliest pottery remains from Poland date back to over 7,000 years ago, to 5,000 to 4,500 BC. Archaeologists call this pottery Stroke-Ornamented Pottery (STK for short from the term *Stichbandkeramik*) given to the pottery by German scientists who studied it.

Most STK pottery is found in central Germany and the early people who manufactured this pottery lived in what are called long houses or post houses. Evidence of this STK culture is distributed around the major rivers in the area like the Oder, Elbe and the Danube and extends into modern day Poland, Austria and the Czech Republic. These ancient people established settlements with similar houses and style of decoration over a wide area.

Stroke-Ornamented Pottery is a distinct style of pottery unique to the culture of the area. Pots are generally pear-shaped with a wide band near the rim and many examples of these pots show handles or knobs at the widest part of the pot. The exterior of these pots are decorated with triangular strokes like the letter "A" or wavy strokes like the letter "U".



Archeological Museum at Poznan
From Exhibition Titled "Ancient History of Greater Poland"
From www.poland.gov.pl

One point that is interesting to note is that even 7,000 years ago, people who inhabited what is now Poland mastered techniques for

making a finer clay pot than in other settlements of the period. Polish pottery was thinner and smoother than what has been found in other areas. The exterior of Polish pots was also shiny, which indicates that people of this area may have been applying a glaze of some sort.

From about 3200 BC to around 1800 BC human society across Europe was dominated by what archaeologists call the Corded Ware Culture, again based on the shape and style of their pottery. This culture included parts of present day Germany and all of present-day Poland. Corded ware pottery is characterized by bands of tiny decorative dots placed in rings around the tan to brown colored ancient vessels. The clay pots were either in the shape of beakers or they were large round pots called amphora.



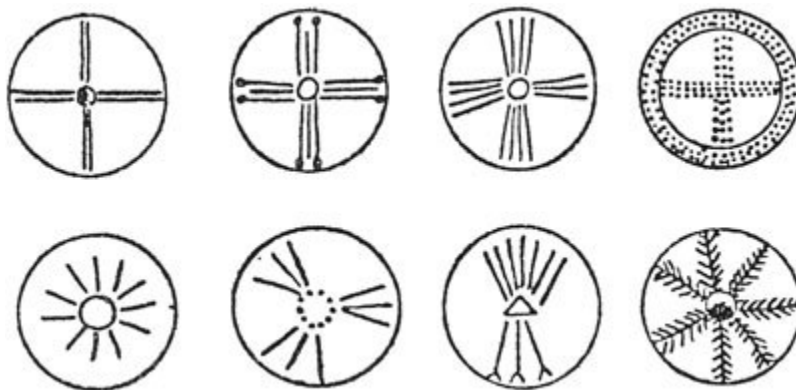
Museum Exhibit of Pottery from the Neolithic Age and the Lusatian Culture
From www.poland.gov.pl

Examples of virtually intact pottery survive from the Neolithic Age when the Lusatian culture existed in modern day eastern Germany and Poland from about 1300 to 500 BC during what historians call the

Bronze Age. The life of this period was marked by permanent settlements and reliance upon agriculture.

By 500 BC face urns appeared on the scene in the area around present day Danzig, Poland, known today as Gdańsk. These clever designs incorporated the human features into the neck of the clay vessel while the bulging round body of the pot became the counterpart of the human torso.

One particularly interesting point is that many male face urns had a decorated lid, presumably following a solar motif. Could these decorative dot patterns be the ancient forerunner of the small dot patterns found on Polish pottery to this day, 4,000 years later? Is there possibly some innate preference for dot (sun) patterns in our genes inherited from our ancient European ancestors?



Male Face Urn Lids, circa 500 BC
From www.vaidilute.com/books/gimbutas

The word "Polska" is prominently displayed on the Polish government's web page as synonymous with Poland. Does the phrase polka dots perhaps derive from these Polish (Polska) dots of old?

Boleslawiec in the Middle Ages

Of course pottery continued to be made in the Boleslawiec area for the centuries since 500 BC! There were influences from ancient Greece and Rome and the plunge into the Dark Ages. But in addition to the ancient finds, archaeologists have located remains of Polish pottery from the Boleslawiec area from the early Middle Ages (according to historians roughly 350 to 1450 AD). Some sources date pottery from the area around 600 AD when it was known as Boleslawice.

We've already mentioned that the Polish town of Boleslawiec itself, also known for a time as the German town of Bunslau, was established in 1202. The fact that clay suitable for making pottery existed in the area was not lost on the local population. One of the first written records about pottery made in Boleslawiec dates from 1380; the historical records of the town of Swidnica include a mention of a potter from Boleslawiec. In 1492 the town was virtually destroyed during the Hussite Wars. Unikats signature pieces are prized by today's collectors but are not new to pottery from Boleslawiec. The earliest known signature pieces date back to the year 1511 when master craftsmen signed their works. The first potters Guild in the area was established about the same time.

The area was hit hard again by war in the 1600's. During the Thirty Year War that lasted from 1618 until 1648, the area around Boleslawiec was decimated; the population of this small town dropped from 600 to just 80 inhabitants. But the determined potters began rebuilding their industry as early as 1650, making fine pottery for royalty and members of the clergy.

Modern Traditions Began 300 Years Ago

During the 1700's, Boleslawiec achieved a reputation for fine pottery that spread across Europe. Savvy businessmen of the era devised a giant clay pot in 1753, reported to stand 6 feet high, which became the advertising symbol for Boleslawiec pottery. A replica of this official symbol of Boleslawiec still occupies a spot on the town square even today.

The original pottery of that time included brown glazed pitchers or tankards with tin lids for beer or wine and large round flasks (large storage vessels). The first glazes were made from local clay which gave the pottery its characteristic brown hue; this is called an earth glaze. Later the pottery was glazed with brown glass.

The ceramic pioneer and inventor Johann Gottlieb Altmann revolutionized the making of pottery in the Boleslawiec area. Until his advancements in pottery making, each piece of pottery was made completely by hand, formed on a potter's wheel. He changed the method of creating each piece through the introduction of reusable molds. Using ceramic molds not only made the production of pottery faster, it also introduced uniformity to the product line.

Altmann also changed the type of clay used; the chemical composition of clay can dramatically change the properties of the resulting formed piece after it is fired in a ceramic kiln or furnace. While the original clays retained a brown color after being fired, the new clay achieved a white product that more resembled fired porcelain. But the white pottery made from the unique clay that is found in the Boleslawiec region retained the durability of stoneware rather than the fragility of porcelain.

Remember that the original earthenware glaze of Boleslawiec pottery was replaced by a glaze made by a thin coating of glass. The

original glass glaze contained lead; at that time people weren't aware of the impacts of lead poisoning, especially on children, like we are today. His final achievement that revolutionized stoneware was that he introduced the use of a glaze made from feldspar instead of lead, making the stoneware safe for daily use.

Of course, pottery and ceramic wares were produced throughout Europe and not just in the area around Boleslawiec. In nearby areas of central Europe known at the time as Bohemia and Monrovia, potters were also advancing techniques for ceramics. Habanerware, an example of which is shown here, was the most important form of ceramic ware from the late 1500's until around 1730. Habanerware was typically decorated with natural motifs and family emblems of wealthy patrons.



Changes in the glaze used in the making of the ceramic piece allowed artists to paint on the item and have the scene or design become permanent after the ceramic piece was fired in a furnace or kiln. This was accomplished by adding an oxide of tin into the glaze along with the lead. Faience is the proper term for any painted pottery with a white or neutral background that utilizes a tin glaze. Historians believe that faience dates back to discoveries made by the ancient potters of Crete around 1200 BC. But it wasn't until the 1600's that the technique was rediscovered and reapplied by European potters.

While the trend in faience was ebbing in western European areas of Spain and France, the potters of the Boleslawiec region began to imitate the blue colors and the ability to paint patterns on the pottery that they produced. But instead of painting with brushes, the

Boleslawiec artists developed a stamping technique for adding decorative elements with fine sponges.

The major emphasis on painted ceramics was to please royalty and other wealthy patrons. The male peacock had long been a symbol of wealth and royalty in central Europe and patterns and colors that were reminiscent of the peacock's opulent tail were incorporated into the designs added to ceramic wares for the dinner table. This is the origin of the brilliant blue hues seen in the designs as well as some of the swirling patterns.

The Twentieth Century

It's fascinating to tour the exquisite palaces and castles from the 1800's when European royalty emulated the ornate palaces of such notable rulers as King Louis the Fourteenth of France and King Ludwig of Bavaria. Polish princes flaunted their wealth and power as well with sumptuous palaces. Along with the royalty came ego and the desire for territorial expansion and the ever-present threats of war that culminated in World War I. Once again the pottery industry in the Boleslawiec area needed to rebuild.

But shortly before the outbreak of the war, forward thinking artisans in Boleslawiec established the Professional School of Ceramics in 1897. The first headmaster of the school was Dr. Wilhelm Pukall who resigned as the technical director of the Royal Manufacture of Porcelain in Berlin to come to Boleslawiec. Sons of local potters



Scenes from Pszczyna, Castle Museum
From www.poland.gov.pl

attended the school and brought the latest ceramic making techniques and designs to their own family-owned shops.

Around 1920, decorating techniques for dinnerware and other ceramic pieces evolved into the increased use of sponge stamping and stenciling. Colorful designs and mat glazes became the most popular styles for dinnerware.

After World War I, in 1936, the Professional School of Ceramics encouraged the formation of the first potters' cooperative and six businesses joined Bunzlauer Braunzeug as the venture was called. Remember that Bunzlauer is the German alternate name for Polish pottery and braun is a German variant of brown. The pottery made by the cooperative reverted to the old characteristic brown glaze with white decorative features.

This brief history of pottery and ceramic production in the Boleslawiec region brings us up to the events of World War II and the economic recovery of the 21st century that we've already discussed. Let's turn our attention to what life is like in Poland today for the hundreds of people who make this wonderful Polish pottery that we all so admire.

Chapter 6

Life in Poland Today



Romantic Notions of Life in Poland
From www.poland.gov.pl



Polish Kindergarten Students Every Day
From www.poland.gov.pl

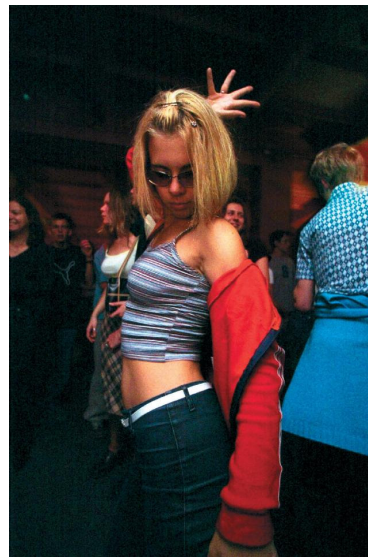
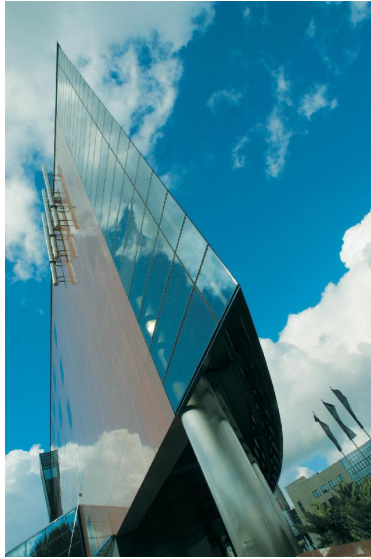
Both of these pictures depict contemporary life in Poland today but the lower picture represents everyday life while the upper picture depicts children dressed in traditional clothing participating in a special local festival. For those of us who live a quarter of the way around the world from Poland, we might think about life in Poland somewhat like the life we saw in the movie *The Sound of Music*, with the Alps of Austria as the locale.

Old romantic notions of kings, princes and people wearing traditional clothing aside, life in Poland today is remarkably similar to everyday life in the United States. Like in most large countries, there is a distinct split in lifestyle between urban and rural areas. Urban life in major metropolitan cities in Europe, Poland included, is highly similar to urban life in the United States.

And since this book is about buying Polish pottery, a word about shopping must be included! Shopping malls in metropolitan areas of Poland are highly similar to the shopping malls sprinkled throughout suburban United States and other European countries. The large grocery store is indeed a supermarket in the populous areas of Poland.

In the pictures of Polish kindergarteners above and the pictures from contemporary scenes below, notice that today's Polish clothing would fit right in with everyday life in the United States. Modern Polish women don't wear babushkas or long skirts any more than American women wear sunbonnets and long full skirts like women wore in pioneer days. Business attire in Poland is on a par with that of the United States as well.

Look at these photos of urban Poland today.



Urban Modern Architecture and Modern Nightclub
From www.poland.gov.pl



View of a Fountain in a Shopping Mall in Warsaw
From www.poland.gov.pl



30% of Polish families grocery shop in supermarkets
From www.poland.gov.pl

Just like in the United States, the rural population of Poland doesn't have local access to shopping malls or supermarkets. In the United States, broadcasters who produce news-related programs like to visit small-town America to cover some local festival or event, showing how quaint parts of the U.S. still are. There are lots of quaint rural areas in Poland too but it would be a mistake to believe that the inhabitants of any small town, Americans or Poles, aren't modern progressive people.

One major way in which life in Poland and life in European countries in general, differs from life in the United States is the rich cultural history that permeates daily living. European cities and towns alike are filled with exquisite old architecture dating back centuries. Vast areas of the United States have only been settled with permanent buildings since 1870 while, if you recall, Boleslawiec was first settled in 1202. Europeans treasure their architectural history and have invested countless dollars in restoring and preserving worthwhile buildings, especially those ravaged by the bombings of World War II. It's only

been in recent decades that the American people want to preserve historic old buildings rather than raze them to build something new in their place.

About Boleslawiec

With its ancient history, Boleslawiec does have one major historic area that is aptly called Old Town. While much of the Old Town area of Boleslawiec was destroyed during World War II, some fine examples of the original architecture remain.



Old Architecture in Boleslawiec
Courtesy of Ceramika Millena

It is easy to see from the pictures that the buildings have been restored to excellent condition. For those fortunate enough to be able to attend the annual Ceramics Festival, the festival is held on the Town Square in Old Town. There are many other historic sites in Boleslawiec and other examples of fine architecture. One popular attraction is the

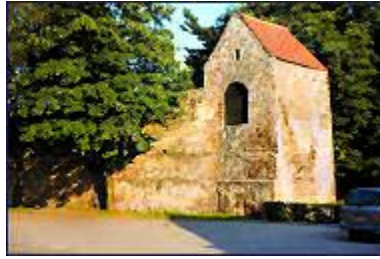
Ceramics Museum with its collection of historic pottery made in Boleslawiec over the centuries. The museum is a “must see” destination for anyone who loves and enjoys Polish pottery.



Old Architecture in Boleslawiec
Courtesy of Ceramika Millena



Modern Architecture in Boleslawiec
<http://www.um.boleslawiec.pl>



Ceramic Museum
<http://www.um.boleslawiec.pl>

However, even though we may emphasize the romantic old architecture and historical significance of 300 years of making celebrated pottery, Boleslawiec is a dynamic and progressive city. In 2005, the year after Poland officially joined the European Union, the city of Boleslawiec was named to the "Golden 16" of the Republic of Poland, which means that Boleslawiec is actively involved in promoting business growth and investment. In the same year, the city was also celebrated as an Environmentally Friendly area. In the recent past companies from Germany, Switzerland and Denmark have invested money in enterprises in Boleslawiec.



View of Boleslawiec
<http://www.um.boleslawiec.pl>

While promotional literature for Polish pottery often refers to Boleslawiec as a village or small town, the population of the area is actually just over 40,000 inhabitants, making Boleslawiec a small city. It is indeed true that Polish pottery is made entirely by hand by skilled artisans, from making the molds to hand loading of ceramic kilns to hand decoration to hand packaging of the final finished product. It's also true that the much of the pottery is made in small family-owned businesses. But these activities can and do take place in a progressive and growing small city in Poland.

We also need to remember that it takes savvy and dynamic business skills to create a global market for what used to be a regional specialty product. The astute business people who manage the Polish pottery operations are to be congratulated for their modern promotional efforts in using the latest marketing technology through the Internet.

When you look at fine piece of Polish pottery in your collection or on your dinner table, first consider it as a wonderful piece of ceramic artistry which embodies a 300-year tradition in design and craftsmanship. Then appreciate it again for skills and devotion of all the other people besides the artist who may have signed the piece – like the mold maker, the person who supervises the firing of ceramics, the person who hand packs the piece so it can arrive thousands of miles away safely, and the business managers who orchestrate sales and distribution. All of these individuals are concerned with producing a quality product that has no equal anywhere else in the world.